

# The Transformation from Religious to Political. An Anthropological Study<sup>1</sup>

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Received date: 03.01.2025; Accepted date: 04.03.2025; Publication date: 27.03.2025

## Abstract

The Zaouias play a significant role in the scientific and social life of the Tuat region in Adrar, where they worked to spread the teachings of Islam, the Arabic language, offer hospitality to guests and travelers, in addition to promoting values of tolerance, unity, and reconciliation, especially within the Tuat community. Their scientific and social roles expanded to neighboring vibrations such as Niger, Mali, and Senegal. In this study, we sought to explore the forms of this expansion, covering the political aspects that led the Tuat Zaouia to combine religious and political elements in its anthropological approach. We also investigate the extent to which the Algerian political authority has utilized the spiritual role of the Tuat Zaouia in northern Mali to mediate political disputes between northern Malian tribes and the Malian authorities.

**Keywords:** Zaouia - Political Conflict - Mediation - Diplomacy.

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**Citation:** Hiri M., Moulay H.M. (2025), Transformation from Religious to Political. An Anthropological. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8 (2), 5-25. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/358-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-2-volvi-2025.html>

## 1. Introduction:

Zaouias are considered the most important religious institutions in the Maghreb societies in general, and in Algeria in particular. In the southwestern part of Algeria, specifically in the Tuat region, the Zaouia is closely linked to the establishment of its towns and villages due to its social role. It provided shelter and food for every needy person or traveler and served as a stopping point for trade caravans heading to or returning from Africa. The establishment of the Tuat Zaouia was not limited to the social domain but also played a role in spreading the Islamic call, even to African countries. It became a hub for resistance fighters during the French colonization, a center for upholding the banner of resistance, and preserving national values.

The role of the Tuat Zaouia has evolved to combine the religious and political. Its followers expanded their influence to African countries due to its scientific and spiritual impact on the tribes and communities in those countries. This has led the political authorities in Algeria to rely on the strong spiritual role of the Tuat Zaouia in Africa to resolve certain political disputes along Algeria's southern borders with African countries, particularly Mali, which is witnessing a recurring political conflict between the Azawad tribes and the Malian government.

This study examines the emerging role of the Tuat Zaouia, which places it in an anthropological approach that does not distinguish between religious and political aspects, unlike many previous sociological studies that focused on the separation of the two. This dual role of the Zaouia between religion and politics is a recent development. Therefore, what impact will the strong presence of Zaouias in Tuat have on Algerian politics? What are the main justifications for this impact and its manifestations in reality? What are the mechanisms that ensure the continuity of the religious and political role of the Zaouia, especially in resolving regional disputes in Algeria's southern borders? To what extent can the Zaouia play a role in Algerian politics through resolving internal and regional conflicts?

### 1.1 Importance of the Study and Its Objectives:

This study aims to explore the religious and political role of the Tuat Zaouia in resolving regional political conflicts in southern Algeria and the extent to which the political authorities in Algeria rely on the Zaouia to carry out this role. In addition to the efforts of Sufi Zaouias in teaching the Quran, the sciences of the Arabic language, the biography of the Prophet, and matters related to spiritual purification, there are essential aspects in which the Zaouia exerts its symbolic and spiritual influence. These aspects include reconciliation within the community, which makes it a local authority competing with the political decision-making authority. Therefore, the exploitation of the Zaouia's religious capital by the political authorities allows it to act as a relief outlet for its followers and a mediator between the grassroots population and the government. The study does

not seek to focus on the historical competition between religious and political power, but rather aims to analyze the reasons for solidarity between the two powers during a specific period, especially during the National Reconciliation and Peace Project in Algeria, which received the endorsement of Zaouias across the country, particularly in the Tuat region. This was followed by the Zaouia being granted a broad role and authority, even to the point of appointing an advisor to the President of the Republic tasked with matters related to Zaouias.

### **1.2 Methodology and Tools:**

Due to the nature of the topic and the specificity of the anthropological study, which relies on various tools in ethnographic research, particularly in the intensive description of the culture that encompasses both official and popular religiosity of the Zaouia, its educational and social roles, and its involvement in resolving disputes, the researcher must be closely involved in the field. This entails recording anything that reflects the culture of the study community, including behaviors, rituals, and sacred symbols, and perhaps even participating in them. Therefore, the study relied on observation as the primary method, meaning closer engagement with the participants, which allowed for closely following the phenomenon under study to guide questions, obtain results, and analyze them. Observation was conducted over extended periods since the political involvement of the Zaouia is most effective in preparation for presidential elections or in resolving a local/regional conflict. Second, the study relied on informants, conducting interviews with them and benefiting from their historical and social expertise in the Tuat region and its Zaouias, as well as opening dialogue with them on multiple occasions, particularly regarding the spiritual influence of the Zaouia in Tuat and its extension to include the tribes in the southern Sahara of Algeria and northern Mali. **Thirdly, Interviews:** These are conducted with the sheikhs of the Zaouias or those in charge of them, as well as with the architects of reconciliation initiatives, to understand the religious and political roles of the Zaouia. Although some of the participants were hesitant about conducting the interview due to sensitivities related to leadership and symbolic authority, the interview questions progressed from the Zaouia's religious role to, subtly, its political role. These quantitative tools are complemented by qualitative tools, as the descriptive method was used to identify the anthropological and political-religious role of the Zaouia. This is further supported by the historical method to explore the historical origins of the Tuat Zaouia and the initial concept behind its establishment.

### **2. Theoretical Foundations of the Zaouia:**

The term "Zaouia" draws upon multiple meanings and perspectives from Sufi and anthropological approaches, and even within Maghreb studies.

#### **2.1 The Zaouia in General Context:**

The term "Zaouia," when used, refers to a spiritual, social, and Islamic institution established by virtuous, righteous, and knowledgeable individuals in the Tuat region for the purpose of spreading knowledge and benefiting the poor and needy in the way of God (Bakrawi, 2017, p. 110). The Zaouia is a place of learning, functioning similarly to boarding schools, operating under a system that requires students and followers to adhere to discipline, obedience, and specific rules regarding study, food, and dress. However, it differs in the aspect of autonomy, as it is not governed by political authorities in matters such as appointing teachers or awarding allowances to teachers and students (Mohammedi, 2013). It is a religious, social, and cultural institution with various tasks and functions. The Zaouia was a center for spiritual life, while also serving as a center for agricultural, commercial, political, administrative, and judicial life. It is composed of various sections such as the mosque, school, and guest house, surrounded by a farm where followers engage in agriculture and trade, and where they host guests and caravan men (Mohamed, 2004, p. 56). The Zaouia represents a vital space intended to reshape those within it—academically, educationally, spiritually, psychologically, and socially. What distinguishes it most is the Sufi Sheikh who leads this religious, social, cultural, and political institution, embodying sanctity for the followers and those who visit it, due to the actions and practices derived from his noble lineage and his oath of allegiance, which solidify his position (Ben Heddou, 2012, p. 19).

Some definitions have focused on the architectural and structural aspect of the Zaouia, describing it as a building with a religious character similar to a school, containing a prayer hall, a room for Quran recitation, and a school for memorizing the Quran and related sciences. Additionally, it hosts sessions of dhikr (remembrance of God) and invocations. The residence of the saint or founder of the Zaouia may also be present, and this residence can include the saint's tomb, often topped with a dome. The tomb may be connected to a cemetery where individuals related to the Zaouia, such as followers and disciples, are buried. The Zaouia also contains rooms for hosting guests, pilgrims, and travelers. This unique architecture, characteristic of the Zaouia in the Maghreb, combines the functions of a mosque and a residence simultaneously.

Returning to the city of Adrar, specifically the Tuat region, the Zaouias are built with a religious character, including a mosque or prayer hall, a Quranic school for memorizing the Quran, Islamic jurisprudence, the biography of the Prophet, and religious sciences. Some Zaouias contain a mosque with a minaret, such as the Zaouia of Sheikh Mohamed Ben Kabir in the city of Adrar, while others have a prayer hall that is exclusively part of the Zaouia, such as the Zaouia of Sheikh Moulay Hajj in the Qsar of Tassefout Fnougil. Regarding the residence of the saint, who is the founder of the Zaouia, some Zaouias have the tomb of their founder connected to a cemetery where followers or those who requested to be buried there are interred, such as the tomb of Sheikh Ben Abdel Karim Al-Maghili in the Zaouia of Sheikh. Other Zaouias have the tomb of their founder located at the

residence itself, as in the case of the tomb of Sheikh Mohamed Ben Kabir and Sheikh Salem Ben Ibrahim, both in the city of Adrar.

In terms of Quran memorization and religious sciences, there are Zaouias in the Tuat region that, in addition to this function, also provide food to the needy, travelers, and guests. Pilgrims also visit these Zaouias when they return from performing the Hajj pilgrimage, seeking blessings. Some Zaouias are exclusively focused on offering food as an act of devotion to the saint or founder's blessings. For example, most pilgrims from Adrar province visit the tomb of Sidi Mohamed Ben Kabir in his Zaouia for blessings. There are also those who travel to the Tuat region where group prayers are held in Zaouias, such as that of Moulay Hajj in the Qsar of Tassefout or Sheikh Hassan Al-Ansari at the Zaouia of Anzjmire.

Returning to the study area, the Zaouia of Aidaoulya in the Qsar of Abani, in the municipality of Fnougil, contains the tomb of its founder, Sheikh Aidaouly Sidi Ibrahim. This tomb is connected to the cemetery and includes a prayer hall without a minaret, a Quranic school, and rooms for hosting guests, pilgrims, and travelers, particularly during the annual visit held in the last month of August to honor the founder. Similarly, the Zaouia of Sheikh Moulay Al-Tahami has the tomb of its founder, Sheikh Moulay Al-Tahami, located at his residence in Old Adrar. It also includes a Quranic school, rooms for hosting guests and travelers, and a seasonal visit each year to honor the founder's soul.

On the other hand, some definitions focus on the spiritual aspect of the Zaouia, particularly the Sufi dimension, by emphasizing retreat and devotion to worship and acquiring knowledge away from society. This includes both religious knowledge, such as the Quran and its sciences, and Sufi knowledge, which involves the invocations and remembrances specific to each Sufi order. Students and followers often reside within the Zaouia, where they live and study. They may also engage in agricultural activities related to the Zaouia's endowments, in addition to serving the Sheikh and assisting with guests and visitors. Some Zaouias even assign the task of cooking to certain students who are dedicated to serving the Sheikh and other students by preparing meals within the Zaouia.

Returning to the Tuat region, most Zaouias adopt an internal system for students, isolating them from the outside world so they can focus on worship, learning, and serving the Zaouia, its Sheikh, and its visitors. Even if the founder of the Zaouia has passed away, a spiritual session, known as the "Slikha" (the Quranic recitation), is held every Friday. This session includes invocations that praise the Sheikh and ask for blessings on his soul through the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This practice is followed by the students in the Zaouia of Moulay Al-Tahami and the Zaouia of Aidaoulya, where students pray for the Sheikh and recite invocations to honor him each Friday.

However, it is important to note that Zaouias in the Tuat region do not only admit resident students. External students may be allowed to enter the Zaouia after their academic term ends, which is when the Sheikh of the Zaouia permits resident students to take a break to visit their families and loved ones.

Some definitions also emphasize the charitable aspect of the Zaouia, particularly in resolving disputes between people, welcoming guests and the needy, providing food, and hosting pilgrims coming from performing the Hajj pilgrimage. Additionally, the Zaouia offers free religious education to students without charge, all of which are charitable activities undertaken by the Zaouia. For example, the Zaouia of Sidi Sheikh Mohammed Ben Kebir in Adrar provides free religious education, offers shelter to guests, the needy, and visitors to the shrine of Sidi Mohammed Ben Kebir, which is adjacent to the Zaouia. Pilgrims also recite Fatiha at the shrine of Sheikh Sidi Mohammed Ben Kebir for blessings. In addition to these functions, some Zaouias in the Tuat region, such as the Zaouia of Sidi Mohammed Ben Kebir, also play a role in resolving conflicts and disputes among people, whether within the Tuat region or its spiritual affiliates. These Zaouias have spiritual extensions that reach even Northern Mali, such as the Zaouia of Kunta in Kunta, the Zaouia of Moulay Abdullah Riqani in Berrkan, the Zaouia of Moulay Al-Tohami in Oudim, and the Zaouia of Sheikh Aidaouly Sidi Ibrahim in the city of Fnoughel. These Zaouias have African extensions, which give them regional influence and authority in resolving disputes, including marital conflicts and issuing fatwas related to personal affairs.

## **2-2. The Zaouia from a Sufi Perspective:**

The Zaouia is an independent organizational structure that emerged from the Sufi field in the Maghreb. It represents one of the highest forms of practice and organization within the religious domain, which was established in the Maghreb since the arrival of Islam in the region. The emergence of the Zaouia as an organization was influenced by historical and structural conditions that granted it the role of action and influence in the country's public life. This was due to the multiplicity and interconnection of the Zaouia's roles and functions (religious, social, educational, economic, military, and political) (Marqouma, 2015, p.99). The Zaouias gained the trust of the Maghrebian public thanks to their positive role in disseminating education at all levels and due to the presence of their Sheikh, who was considered one of the blessed saints. Moreover, they contributed to spreading Sufism in both urban and rural areas, paving the way for the emergence of Sufi orders (Tawhiri, 2016, p.167). The Zaouia is a Sufi organization characterized by a unique architectural structure and a hierarchical organizational framework that has existed since the 16th century. The Zaouia also features a dome and the shrine of its founding Sheikh, accompanied by a cemetery or "garden" where family members, close followers, and the Sheikh's companions are buried (Marqouma, 2015, p.100). The rise of Sufism in Africa was not a direct result of political

crises or social upheaval. Instead, the first experiences of asceticism and Sufism, associated with the "Ribat" institutions, led some scholars to consider the Merinid period, with its crises, as the true origin of Sufism in the Maghreb and Africa (Al-Kahlaoui, 2009, p.48).

In the Tuat region, most of the Zaouias are Sufi, but they are not associated with specific Sufi orders. Instead, they focus on religious education, offering food to the needy and travelers. The leader of the Zaouia is called the Sheikh of the Zaouia, while the students who reside there are referred to as "students" or "disciples." For instance, the Zaouia of Moulay Al-Tohami and the Zaouia of Aidaouly Sidi Ibrahim are both Sufi in nature but contain Quranic schools for students. They also have guest houses for travelers and the needy, as well as shrines to the founding Sheikhs of the respective Zaouias. In these Zaouias, the leadership is not held by a Murabit (leader) or a "Moqaddem" as it would be in order-based Zaouias, but by the Sheikh of the Zaouia or his successor. The Sheikh is responsible for determining the location of the Zaouia's buildings, as well as for overseeing its expansion, with all management of the Zaouia's facilities following his directives. For example, the Zaouia of Sheikh Moulay Al-Tohami is located within the urban area, while the Zaouia of Aidaouly Sidi Ibrahim is situated in Qsar Abbani. Both Zaouias are simple in structure, with resources coming from lands, fields, and donations from benefactors. They may also receive material support from the state or be granted land.

## **2-3. Toward the Anthropology of the Zaouia:**

### **2.3.1. The Zaouia in Colonial Studies:**

Montet suggests that religious zeal, historically, has always been one of the factors influencing the lives of righteous people and saints. Anyone able to openly express their religious convictions forcefully becomes a righteous person, and the path of righteousness often intersects with religious zeal in confronting the Christian enemy (Montet, 1909, p.10). Bill argues that the main reason Islam was not widely spread within the rural Moroccan areas, thus preventing religious understanding from advancing among the tribes, was the incapacity of the "original Berber religion" to accommodate alternative beliefs. While Bill acknowledges the lack of historical evidence about the nature of these "original Berber beliefs," he argues that the relatively short duration for which the religious ideologies of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties remained dominant indicates that these belief systems could not replace the indigenous ones. He also points to the success of Islamic Sufism among the Berbers and its rapid spread within the tribes, where the Sufi Sheikhs were integrated into the pre-existing belief network and were believed to possess the power to grant blessings. These beliefs tied to righteous men and Zaouias persisted within Moroccan society from historical times until the early 20th century, without significant change, which, according to Bill, signified a clear decline of Islamic civilization in North Africa (Bill, 1938, p.388).



### 2.3.2. The Zaouia in Anglo-Saxon Anthropology Studies:

Eickelman argues that while awareness of official Islamic principles is much stronger today than it was in the past, the type of Islam advocated by reformers is less compatible with social organization. Islam, like other major religious traditions, is constantly reshaped and reinterpreted across generations and new contexts, even though those who uphold it may not realize that they are reinterpreting it (Eickelman, 1989, p.2).

In the "divisionist model" of Ernest Gellner, Sufi saints (Awliya) provide the tribes with continuity and a stable structure that is lacking in their political system. These saints practice a form of politics that is unique; they are qualified to resolve problems and disputes arising between different tribes through the symbolic authority they hold. These saints offer both a physical space and a moral guarantee, which allows the conflicting tribes to meet and conduct elections. The gathering and election take place at the Zaouia, near the shrine of the founding ancestor, due to the sanctity of the shrine and its surroundings, where disputes are not allowed. Additionally, the saints provide moral persuasion and mediation, ensuring that the elections lead to results that are accepted by everyone.

In addition to their role as mediators and arbitrators between tribes, Zaouias and saints perform other functions, such as determining and guaranteeing the stability of boundaries. This helps in managing agreements between various tribes regarding the administration of pastoral areas and their use. They also play a role in facilitating trade relations and the movement of commercial caravans through tribal lands. Caravans often stop at the Zaouia or the saints' shrines during their travels. Thus, the saints emerge as key figures in managing political conflicts that may arise between tribes, ensuring the continuity of tribal customs in the region. Through their righteousness and religious piety, which grants them symbolic (religious) authority, they use this authority to mediate political disputes. This stands in contrast to the elected leader, whose powers are limited and ineffective in resolving conflicts between tribes.

While the form of religiosity promoted by the saints differs from the normative religiosity advocated by scholars in urban areas, as the latter are seen as the qualified producers of "correct" religious knowledge, the saints' model of religiosity is a conciliatory one. It addresses the tribal needs while also fulfilling the requirements of belonging to the Islamic ummah. This model ensures that they remain within the broader Islamic framework, while also distinguishing themselves through a local religious model (Mosbah, 2011, p.163). **Gertz** stops at the concept of 'Zawiya' where he says, 'This structure, at least outwardly, resembles our conception of the image of mystical practice more than our conception of the figure of the saint (wali). The Zawiya, literally, is a place where the pious gather, where they engage in many spiritual exercises, and the term 'Zawiya' is



used to mean a voluntary religious organization where the brothers meet, and it is often associated with a shrine.' (Jermouni, 2015, p. 11).

### 2.3.3. The Zawiya in Maghrebi Studies:

In his book "The Zawiya and the Party," **Nur al-Din al-Zahi** presents the definition of researcher **Muhammad Qibli** for the Zawiya as 'a composite institution, thus defining its essence and distinguishing it from the functions the Zawiya performs in its social context. It is a historical structure combining the Rabat and the sect, that is, the act of the pious distinguished by its individuality, its jihadi spirit, and its presence on the borders and pockets of colonized Morocco, on the one hand, and a religious institution within which individuals organized and united, thanks to rituals, signs, and a specific vision of the relationship between God and His worshipers. It is an institutional structure that begins with the doctrinal or Sufi path level, the designated path for followers by the founding Sheikh, which is translated into formulas of litanies, remembrances, and groups, then followed by the organizational level or sect, that is, the way that has taken an organized form defining the relations among the disciples themselves and with their Sheikh, allowing for communication and ensuring unity even when places and times are distant. It ends with the field level or the Zawiya, that is, the material existence of the path and the sect in place and time.'

Therefore, the term Zawiya prevails over other terms like Sufi path or sect. Without the Zawiya, that is, without the material realization of the Sufi path, the Sheikh and his followers would not be able to achieve their goals. The Zawiya, in this context, constitutes the institution and the structured framework of an organized Sufi path embodied in reality. In this embodiment, the strength or weakness of the path appears, as well as its effectiveness or the fragility of its organizational structure, the strength or weakness of its Sheikh, the level of respect and obedience of its followers, and the extent of its influence and reach.

In addition to the historical and institutional dimension of the structure, this also contains a cultural dimension, considering that the Zawiya is an institution for the synthesis of honor and blessing, local historical Islam and textual Islam, sacred and worldly, economic and ritual, architectural and symbolic... etc. It is at the same time the synthesis of all these partial structures. This Zawiya situation is characterized by a form of distinction within the Arab-Islamic institutional space, which drives it to operate within it, sometimes through intersection, integration, adaptation, and at other times through competition and conflict.' (Al-Zahi, 2011, pp. 6, 7).

Thus, according to **Nur al-Din al-Zahi**, the Zawiya is a composite institution made up of three levels:

- 1.The doctrinal level or Sufi path
- 2.The organizational level or sect

### 3. The field level or Zawiya itself

But does every Zawiya have a doctrinal or Sufi path? For example, the Zawiyas in the Tuat region are Sufi, but not doctrinal in nature. These are Zawiyas focused on religious knowledge and providing food for travelers and wayfarers. They are Zawiyas that have students or seekers of knowledge. As for the field level, all Zawiyas, whether doctrinal or not, share this level. The value of the Zawiya in Tuat is determined by its contribution to the social context, whether in the religious field, the teaching and memorization of the Quran and religious sciences, or in the large number of graduates who become imams and preachers. This is the fundamental basis upon which the value of the Zawiyas in the Tuat region is measured. As for the role some Zawiyas play in other areas, such as the political role, this is considered one of the secondary roles of the Zawiya in the Tuat region.

### 3- The Religious and Social Reality of the Zawiya and its Foundation for the Political:

"The Tuat Zawiya played its scientific role and graduated many imams and preachers. However, it was observed, especially after the death of Sheikh Mohammed Ben Kabir (may God have mercy on him) in 2000, that the number of scientific Zawiyas declined, and fewer students came to study there. This was due to the deaths of the founders, and many students believed that the blessing of knowledge had gone with their passing. Even the students who had been stationed in these Zawiyas either sought employment as imams and preachers or established Zawiyas in their own cities and villages. When interviewing one of the students who graduated from Sheikh Ben Kabir's Zawiya and became an imam, he mentioned, 'The blessing of the Zawiya went with the death of Sheikh Mohammed Ben Kabir, especially after the mosque of the Zawiya was demolished and rebuilt, not to mention the constant changes in the annual remembrance of Sheikh Mohammed Ben Kabir's death, where now anyone can manage the activities of this remembrance.'

From this student's statement, it can be inferred that the sacred has become intertwined with the worldly, as the isolation that once prevailed in the Tuat Zawiya has been dismantled. This happened due to the intervention of civil society in organizing the commemoration of the death of its saints, which used to rely solely on endowments, religious donations, and charitable contributions. The openness of the Zawiya even reached the point where the political authority intervened in organizing the commemoration of the death of its saints. The country's high authority officially declared the anniversary of Sheikh Mohammed Ben Kabir's death on September 15th of every year, making it a national day for the imam.

The Zawiya has fulfilled its social role since its establishment, providing shelter to the needy, the poor, guests, and pilgrims. However, with the diminishing of its endowment resources and charitable donations, this role has been limited to only a few Zawiyas. The imam of the Zawiya of Moulay Al-Tahami in Oukedim stated that 'the Zawiya, especially after the death of its founder, has

become limited to education, without offering food. Food is only provided during the annual commemoration of the death of Sheikh Moulay Al-Tahami Gitawi (may God have mercy on him).'

This statement indicates that the rise in living costs and the lack of funding for some Zawiyas has led to a decline in their material status, which in turn has affected their symbolic status, particularly in the current time when material values dominate. The political authority has worked to strengthen the popular Islam of the Zawiyas in response to the rigid fundamentalist Islam that is entering the Maghreb societies. The authority has supported the Zawiyas both materially and morally to play a role in spreading values of tolerance and rejecting violence. Many Zawiya sheikhs have established relationships with the political authority, gaining social, political, and symbolic influence that has enabled them to play social and political roles, such as energizing electoral campaigns or acting as mediators on behalf of the authority in some regional political disputes in southern Algeria."

The Zawiya was able to play its religious and political role. The head of the **Zawiya of El-Idawliya** (Haj Ma'rouf) stated, 'I have traveled several times with a delegation of Zawiya sheikhs from Tuat to the Azawad region in northern Mali to urge the Azawadi tribes to sign an agreement with the Malian state and avoid fighting and violence. I also traveled with another delegation to the Tuareg of Libya to hold an agreement with the Algerian authorities, especially after the Libyan crisis.' This explains the dual role of the Tuat Zawiya, as it gained support from the authorities in Adrar, where Zawiya sheikhs hold a religious and political symbolic status, and their recommendations are taken seriously, particularly regarding local affairs in the Adrar province.

**3.1. Religious and Political Authority:** Politics cloaks itself in religion to gain legitimacy from the public regarding its policies towards them. This creates an integrated relationship between the religious and the political, where Sufi Zawiyas receive support from the authority due to their spiritual dominance and success. This support is also used to resolve conflicts within their community and beyond their regional scope. On the other hand, the political authority benefits from the support of the religious institution, particularly during election campaigns, in spreading peace and reconciliation, rejecting violence, and maintaining the Zawiya as an outlet and intermediary between individuals and decision-makers.

The son of **Moulay Al-Tahami Gitawi** stated, 'The tribes in conflict with the Malian government often approached the Sheikh in his Zawiya, usually after the afternoon prayer. Initially, consultations were held to reach a peace agreement between the tribes and the Malian authorities. Over time, these consultations expanded to include many prominent figures from within and outside the Tuat region, especially from the students of Moulay Al-Tahami Gitawi, with Sheikh **Moussa Tih** leading the group. Due to security concerns, the meeting place was moved to the

capital, with the presence of the minister **Daho Ould Kablia** and representatives from the Malian authorities on one side, and the Azawadi tribes on the other.'

This statement makes it clear that the Zawiya institution was working towards regional reconciliation without prompting from the political authority, as believed by **Abdullah Hamoudi**. Instead, the political authority provided protection, increased powers, and influence to the religious institution to carry out its role effectively.

### **3.2. The Social Role of the Zawiya Locally and Regionally:**

In addition to its educational role and its connection to the memorization of the Qur'an and Islamic sciences, the zawiya plays an active role in resolving disputes, both within the Tuat region and beyond, reaching even the scattered tribes in northern Mali, which share a spiritual and familial bond with Tuat. These tribes often seek the legal rulings (fatwas) of the zawiya's scholars in matters of social disputes, and even in marriage contracts. This has made the religious reference of the zawiya a unifying factor for these Azawad tribes, and it might extend even to a political reference. Professor Ahmed Jafari emphasized that "historically, the zawiya provided protection for the trade caravans in Tuat, and through these caravans, Islam was spread across West Africa, with many scholars, including [Sheikh Abdul Karim al-Maghili], establishing Qur'anic schools and taking on roles in issuing fatwas, resolving conflicts, and reconciling differences."

### **3.3 The Political and Religious Integration of the Zawiya in Conflict Resolution:**

In several interviews conducted with the son of (Moulay Al-Tahmi Ghitaoui) and his students (such as Sheikh Moussa Tih and Sheikh Ali Jafari), they confirmed that on many occasions, the tribes of northern Mali turned to the zawiya in (Ouadim in Adrar) and held numerous sessions with its Sheikh in order to resolve their conflicts with the Malian government. It is known that these tribes also have families and clans in southern Algeria (Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timiawin). The success of the Sheikh of the zawiya in communicating with all parties involved in the conflict was supported by the Algerian government during the presidency of the late Abdelaziz Bouteflika. In a meeting with the second initiator of peace efforts (Sheikh Haj Ma'arouf), the Sheikh of the Idaoualiyah zawiya praised the efforts of the late Moulay al-Tahmi, stating that he always encouraged him to mediate in disputes. This was also highlighted by (Hajj Bakri al-Bakri), the official spokesman for the Bakri zawiya.

From this, it is clear that the political approach to conflict resolution is not limited to security measures, but that the spiritual approach also plays a key role. It is not necessarily about being a follower of a Sheikh, as is the case with (Abdullah Hamoudi), nor about being an intermediary without authority, as seen in the study by (Ernest Gellner). Rather, it is the religious capital, with its powerful symbols, that allows followers to transcend their tribal affiliations in favor of a religious and political reference.

### **3.4. The Influence of the Zawiya: Between Expansion and Retraction.**

The urbanization witnessed in Adrar province, along with the establishment of institutes and universities, has reduced the educational role of the zawiya. Additionally, the emergence of executive directorates and oil companies has created multiple centers of influence within the province. Despite the political support for the zawiya during the presidency of the late Abdelaziz Bouteflika, many of the young people interviewed in the province believe that this religious institution worked to serve its own interests at the expense of their demands for employment. They argue that the zawiya did not use its influence to achieve these demands but instead worked to suppress demonstrations calling for them in service of the political authorities. As a result, many began to label the sheikhs of the zawiya as “sheikhs of the world and interests.”

### **4- Conclusion:**

The political role of the zawiya does not mean that it neglected its educational and social role locally, as many zawiyas continue to perform this function, such as the Zawiya of Hajj Hassan in Anzjemir or the Zawiya of Hajj Ahmed al-Maghili in the Zawiya of Sheikh Ben Abdul Karim al-Maghili. Especially with the political transformations in the country, where reliance on the political role of the zawiya has decreased, it has pushed the zawiya to change its strategy in line with the social, economic, and political transformations of the country. It has worked on restructuring itself and finding a symbolic place in the context of the dominance of material imagination over cultural imagination.

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